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The Image of Dentistry

A Panel Discussion

Atlantic City, October 12, 1963

INTRODUCTION

Philip E. Blackerby, Jr., D.D.S., M.S.P.H.
President, American College of Dentists

The American College of Dentists is privileged to sponsor this afternoon's program on "The Image of Dentistry." Among the principal purposes of the College, since its founding in 1920, have been the following, as stated in its Constitution:

1. To promote the ideals of the dental profession;
2. To advance the standards and efficiency of dentistry; and
3. To improve public understanding and appreciation of oral health service.

While we modest dentists have long been convinced that the quality of American dentistry is outstanding throughout the world, we have also been realistic enough to appreciate that we may not always "see ourselves as others see us"—a fact of which we are not infrequently reminded by cartoons, television programs, and quips in newspaper columns that project images of the dentist that are something less than complimentary. Occasional characterizations such as "tooth carpenters" and "oral mechanics" are disconcerting, but they perhaps serve the useful function of keeping us from becoming smug and complacent, and of stimulating the desire to achieve greater public respect and appreciation of the real meaning and significance of dental health service.

John Gardner, in the "Pursuit of Excellence," offered the following analogy that may be of some comfort to dentistry and other occupations that are inherently less glamorous than careers in, for example, surgery or the theater:

An excellent plumber is infinitely more admirable than an incompetent philosopher. The society which scorns excellence in plumbing because plumbing is a humble activity, and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because it is an exalted activity, will have neither good plumbing nor good philosophy. Neither its pipes nor its theories will hold water.

One of the latest efforts of the American College of Dentists to "improve public understanding and appreciation of oral health ser-